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LETTER DATED 12 AUGUST 1996 FROM THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I.
OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF GEORGIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS
ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the statement of 11 August 1996 by the President of Georgia, H.E. Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, regarding the latest developments in Chechnya, Russian Federation, and the situation in the Caucasus region as a whole.

May I request your kind assistance in circulating the text of the statement as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) George VOLSKI
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex

[Original: Russian]

Statement made by the President of Georgia, Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, on 11 August 1996

Once again there is war in Grozny, once again blood is being shed. The President of the Russian Federation proclaimed 10 August as a day of mourning. But it is not only in the Russian Federation that there is grief. There is grief in Georgia as well for the Russians and Chechens who have died.

It is alarming that black clouds have again gathered in the skies of the Caucasus.

Despite the progress that has been made, the basic issues of the conflict between Georgia and Ossetia have not been resolved.

There has been no real progress in the settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia.

The fraternal peoples of the Transcaucasus continue to be troubled by the problem of Nagorny Karabakh.

It would be naive to think that these conflicts have nothing in common, that they can be settled in isolation, without joint efforts.

If we look at the genesis of the conflict in the Caucasus, we find that there are many common elements both in the historical heritage of the previous order and in the fateful errors of the present day.

In particular, I have more than once stated, and I repeat yet again, that were it not for the genocide of the Georgians in Abkhazia, with the participation of thousands and thousands of guerrillas who are nationals of another State, the tragedy in Chechnya would also not have taken place. Certain "strategists" determined with absolute accuracy the date of the fall of Sukhumi, without making allowance for the fact that the movement of an iceberg obeys its own laws, and as a result tens of thousands of people have already become victims of the returning boomerang of events.

This hurts Chechnya, it hurts the Russian Federation as a whole, and it hurts us as well. Georgia has done everything to ensure that the Georgian-Russian border which separates our country from Chechnya would remain peaceful. This is better for the Russian Federation, and it is better for the Chechens as well, and for the other peoples of the Caucasus.

It was our awareness of the common responsibility of the peoples of the Caucasus that brought us to Kislovodsk. After participating in that meeting, the Russian President B. N. Yeltsin made the topic of a "peaceful Caucasus" part of his election platform.

And the initial results were encouraging. We felt the full force of the inexhaustible potential of the Caucasus factor in establishing peace and stability in the region, a factor which had come into being over the course of centuries through the complex process of the coexistence among our peoples. Unfortunately, the events of recent days in Grozny and other parts of Chechnya call in question the future of the Kislovodsk agreements.

We must not forget that the cancer of the conflict has already begun to spread. We also need to remember that even in the event of minor complications it will be transformed into new foci of incurable disease.

Accordingly, there is a need to act promptly, not to put off to tomorrow what can be done today.

We are grateful to the politicians and diplomats of the Russian Federation for their active work to settle the conflicts in Georgia and for the positive role of the peace-keeping forces, especially in Tskhinvali.

Without the Russian Federation, an early settlement of the conflicts in the Caucasus would be a vain hope, and this must be universally understood.

We are grateful to the United Nations and the Security Council for the resolutions adopted and the action taken, for the explicit calls for the return of the refugees and for the protection of the interests of Georgia's territorial integrity.

I express my gratitude to the Budapest Summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which condemned the ethnic cleansing in Abkhazia.

The unequivocal support extended by the countries of the Commonwealth with regard to the main issues involved in the settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia and their condemnation of aggressive separatism as a completely impermissible and unacceptable phenomenon for the States making up that regional international organization were of vital importance.

We appreciate the constant support of the "Friends of Georgia" in the building of a new democratic and indivisible State.

It is important that active support for the most recent Security Council resolution was expressed by the Government of Turkey, which emphasized the significance for the region of maintaining Georgia's territorial integrity.

In view of the responsibility that rests on the peoples of the Caucasus in the struggle for their common stability and for a peaceful Caucasus, I invite Ludwig Chibirov to meet with me in the next few days in order to define how we are to live today and tomorrow and how to renew the centuries-old tradition of coexistence between our peoples. However, a necessary condition for the meeting is not to generate such a mist that we shall be unable to see one another (those who know what is involved will understand what I am saying).

I call on Vladislav Ardzinba and on all those whose position is aligned with his, on the population remaining in Abkhazia and on all Abkhaz people: there has been more than enough time for reflection and discussion. And what are the lessons? Thousands of people shot, killed, tens of thousands of homes burned, 300,000 refugees, the best part of the youth of Abkhazia and Georgia fallen victim to a senseless war.

The blood of people who are not guilty of anything, the expulsion of tens of thousands of families from their homes will not bring happiness to anyone.

What I am saying is not a matter of instructions or lectures (God forbid): the world has changed, the laws of the coexistence of States and peoples have changed. Instability in one region is an alarm signal for the whole world. The example of the former Yugoslavia is instructive in this respect. Peoples are beginning to live in the conditions of a different, new world order. The ending of the cold war without bloodshed and loss of life changed the conception of wars, and of who wins them. At the present juncture military "successes" won at the cost of blood and the expulsion of people from their native land are to be equated with the defeat, the violation of universal human moral principles. No one can draw any other portrait of a "victor", no one can impose any other image.

Let me be quite frank: the Russian Federation will never reconcile itself to the separation of Abkhazia from Georgia, for that would run counter to its strategic interests. Our great neighbour will not admit even the theoretical possibility of Abkhazia becoming a part of it. For the Russian Federation, a permanent member of the Security Council, that is totally unacceptable.

At the same time, I have said more than once and I repeat yet again that on various occasions, at various stages the Georgian authorities made fateful mistakes. This affects our relations with the Abkhaz people, with the Ossetians and others. More to the point, most of all it affects the fate of Georgians themselves. For much of what has happened, we ourselves are to blame, and this too is a historic lesson.

The Georgian and Abkhaz peoples will be happy only if they can live together, and I am ready to apply all my experience, all my abilities to lay the foundations for this happy future and to build it.

I am ready to meet in the near future with Vladislav Ardzinba and his representatives, but the meeting must be held in the conviction that the necessary readiness exists and positive results can be achieved. At one time, our dialogue was conducted in Gudauta. I am ready to meet with him again in any part of Georgia, including Abkhazia.

In conclusion, let me say that by settling the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, by achieving major progress in the Abkhaz conflict, we shall, I am convinced, also be facilitating the settlement of the conflict in Chechnya, the more rapid solution of the problems of Karabakh and, in general, the building of a peaceful, prosperous Caucasus in the name of our common future.